

STATEMENT OF DONALD W. MURPHY, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING S. 1387, TO PROVIDE FOR AN UPDATE OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE JOHN H. CHAFEE BLACKSTONE VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR, TO EXTEND THE AUTHORITY OF THE JOHN H. CHAFEE BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR COMMISSION, TO AUTHORIZE THE UNDERTAKING OF A SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY OF SITES AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES WITHIN THE CORRIDOR, AND TO AUTHORIZE ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CORRIDOR.

June 22, 2006

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 1387, a bill that would reauthorize the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission for a period of 10 years, provide for an update of corridor planning documents, authorize a Special Resource Study, authorize additional appropriations for the corridor for operations and development, and increase the membership of the commission. The Department is unable to support enactment of S. 1387 as presently drafted, but would support a limited reauthorization of the commission. The Department opposes the authorization of \$10 million in additional development funds.

The John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, which has been in existence for 20 years, is considered among the leading national heritage efforts in the nation. The commission that has managed the corridor's programs and projects has made exceptional strides in the preservation and protection of a myriad of resources and in

interpreting the rich stories of the “Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution” – the Blackstone River Valley of Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

It was in the Blackstone River Valley at Pawtucket that Samuel Slater, a British immigrant, in concert with Moses Brown developed the first successful textile manufacturing mill that triggered our own industrial revolution, one that continues today. Indeed, the Blackstone River Valley itself became a major center of manufacturing in the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries. Today, largely due to the recognition of the corridor by Congress, and the important work of the commission, the region has seen a rebirth through intelligent and adaptive reuse of previous mills and manufacturing facilities. As residents came to fully understand the nation-changing history of their region, the stories of its people, and its untapped community and economic potential through historic preservation, pride of place and appreciation of shared heritage soon followed.

National heritage areas and historic preservation efforts throughout the country have benefited from the leadership and best practices for which Blackstone is well-known. The commission has and continues to enjoy exceptional support among state and local governments, businesses, private organizations, and the general public of the region.

The National Park Service (NPS) has had a unique relationship with the commission and its innovative and productive work since the corridor was established in November 1986. Consistent with section 4 of the authorizing legislation, the NPS has provided staff to the

commission and conducts ranger-led interpretive programs in the corridor. Congress, recognizing this special relationship, has consistently authorized funding for projects in the corridor in the Line Item Construction portion of the NPS budget. The executive director of the commission, a NPS employee, also serves as Superintendent of the Roger Williams National Memorial, a small unit of the National Park System in Providence, Rhode Island.

S. 1387, besides providing for reauthorization of the commission, authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a Special Resource Study to determine whether areas in the corridor meet the criteria for congressional designation as a unit of the National Park System. We believe the conduct of such a study is timely and appropriate. It would permit the Secretary to make recommendations to Congress including the future role that NPS may play in the preservation and protection of additional corridor resources.

The National Park System Advisory Board in its recent report entitled *Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas* recognized the important role of national heritage areas in expanding conservation stewardship and in identifying and preserving significant historic resources. The report also recognized that national heritage areas need a legislative foundation that establishes a clear process for designation, administration, and evaluation. The national heritage area program legislation (S. 243) that passed the Senate last year and is supported by the Department also outlined the steps to be followed for success as a national heritage area. Both the Advisory Board report and the proposed legislative framework recommended that prior to consideration for reauthorization, an individual

national heritage area should be the subject of a study to determine any future and appropriate level of NPS involvement including, but not limited to, future federal funding. Blackstone is the first heritage area to have followed this process. A study prepared in 2005 by the NPS Conservation Study Institute entitled, *Reflecting on the Past, Looking to the Future* concluded that there is a clear need to sustain an effective coordinating framework for the corridor and an on-going relationship with the NPS.

The Department believes that S. 1387, if amended, can provide the basis whereby the important work of the commission may continue while providing an opportunity for the NPS and the commission to explore viable alternatives for the future management of heritage resources in the region. This can be accomplished while maintaining the cooperative working relationship that has been the hallmark of our joint efforts to preserve, protect, and enhance the nationally significant and important resources of the Blackstone River Valley.

The Department recommends that the bill be amended in section 2(d) to only reauthorize the commission for a five-year period, and that the update of the management plan in section 2(c) include a requirement that the plan identify a successor non-Federal management entity for the corridor, comprised of a board with broad regional representation. The updated plan should also provide the schedule and manner in which the transition of the management of the corridor will occur from the present federal commission to a new management entity by the end of the five-year reauthorization period. Finally, the plan should provide information on how the heritage corridor will be

financially self-sufficient as its work continues beyond the five-year reauthorization period.

The Department would further recommend that the Special Resource Study authorized in section 2(e) be submitted to the Committee on Resources in the House of Representatives and Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in the Senate no later than 90 days after it is completed instead of the proposed 30-day requirement in order to permit full consideration by the Secretary to make an informed recommendation to Congress. Finally, the Department would recommend that section 2(f) be amended to strike the authorization for \$10 million in development funds in order to be consistent with the appropriation levels of other national heritage areas.

The Department believes that these amendments will permit the John H. Chafee Blackstone National Heritage Corridor Commission to continue its significant contributions to the region while providing the necessary time for transition to a non-federal, locally supported management entity to carry on the commission's valuable work into the future.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony and I am prepared to answer any questions that you or other members of the committee might have at this time.